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ABSTRACT

There are many questions regarding the adoption and the use of the Continuing Education Unit (CEU). Who supports CEU? The National University Extension Association, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and many other State and institutional sponsors recognize the CEU. What is the CEU? Ten normal classroom hours of noncredit continuing education constitute one CEU. Why the move to CEU? Changing educational, career, and technological needs are all factors. When is the CEU a fact? The CEU is inevitable once there is an identifiable sponsor administering, instructing, measuring, and recording individual participation on an accessible, transferable, and essentially permanent basis. Where may the CEU be applied? The judgmental factor serving degree programs can't be uniformly applied; in the final analysis, the marketplace decides. How is the CEU to be used? The user, alone or in groups, determines where his continuing education program takes him. The sponsor should be concerned only with the merits of the modular product or CEU of the group served. (MW)

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The Continuing Education Unit

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Introduction

For several years now, I have been privileged to speak to this annual meeting of the CES Division, ASEE, about "the continuing education unit," or CEU, as it has come to be referenced. As with the incipient matter of the adoption of the metric system by the USA, the CEU is surely another "idea whose time has come."

But the CEU does not have the pressure of worldwide adoption behind it or the compelling logic and scientific rationality of the system that is espoused to assure its survival in a period of vacillation, of doubt or of open opposition or apathy where its application is being considered. However, each forum of this kind permits us to achieve another quantum step of understanding insofar as the purposes, the desirability and the future of the CEU is concerned.

Let us review briefly, therefore, the WHO, WHAT, WHY, WHEN, WHERE and HOW of the continuing education unit. It is in terms of these simple parameters that we might hope to build additional support for the CEU at a time when a "critical mass" of acceptance is about to be achieved. Given this review of the antecedents, the background and the rationale for the CEU, we may be better able to appreciate it for subsequent adoption and use.

I say "adoption and use" because the uniform system nationally for the measurement and recognition of individual participation in noncredit continuing education envisages separate responsibilities in these two facets of one and the same effort. This meeting is an important forum because both potential "adopters" and would-be "users" of the CEU are represented among you.

The CEU is intended to be equally applicable, whether in the packaging of a continuing education offering or in the development of a meaningful program of individual achievement through taking advantage of such opportunities. The CEU permits not only a host of potential sponsorships, but also is intended to be useful in any of a number of walks of life that are representative of both professional and nonprofessional career fields. Thus, the CEU is a matter of both convenience and utility in the uniform packaging of all continuing education opportunities and serves simultaneously as a useful measure of individual achievement through participation in the same.

Who Supports CEU?

The CEU is the recommendation of an "ad hoc national task force on the feasibility of a uniform system for the measurement and recognition of individual participation in noncredit continuing education." The task force was created by the resolution of representatives of 33 national organizations attending a National Planning Conference, July 1 and 2, 1968, on the general topic for which the task force was later created. The original conference was co-sponsored by National University Extension Association, American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, U. S. Office of Education, HEW, and the U. S. Civil Service Commission.

The CEU should now take on meaning among both the principal producers or sponsors of continuing education and the users thereof. The latter may be viewed as either the immediate participants in continuing education or as the organizational entities that have a legitimate concern for the continuing education of individuals coming under their jurisdiction or purview.

The task force, now known as the National Task Force on the Continuing Education Unit, had representation initially from such diverse interests as industry, labor, medicine, engineering, government, extension education and representative professional and educational associations at the national level. The distribution of membership has been maintained equally broad throughout the five-year history of the ad hoc task force

In addition to the aforestated genesis of the CEU, a great many educational institutions and other would-be sponsors of continuing education have begun to package their noncredit learning opportunities in the CEU mode. This has been done, to this time, in an experimental or ad hoc manner by many of the endorsers of the CEU in the field of practice. In fact, the National University Extension Association encouraged a one-year experiment in the institutional use of the CEU by some 20-odd of its members about two years ago. Many of these same institutions have continued in the packaging of educational opportunities in terms of available CEU and have since maintained an accessible and an ostensibly transferable record of individual participation in the same.

Of particular note is the fact that the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the regional accrediting agency serving eleven southern states, is in the process of implementing the use of a so-called "Standard Nine" that calls for the packaging of all "special activities," including public service, extension and noncredit education, in all of its ramifications, in the CEU mode. This provision applies to over 600 institutions of higher education throughout the traditional south. It is expected to become a highly unifying force in the recording of the wide spectrum of "special activities" offered in the name of institutional outreach. The CEU will provide opportunities, as well, for individual development in the areas of greatest need.

Many statewide systems of publicly supported higher education have also begun to incorporate the CEU in their internal system of accounting for continuing education activities. A number of these states are in the southern region, as mentioned above, but the

CE 001 582

statewide use of the CEU is also common to other states and among several institutional sponsors of continuing education outside of that region as well.

What Is CEU?

The CEU has been defined as applying to all noncredit continuing education of post-secondary level. Thus, it applies to all reputable sources of sponsorship and all subjects, formats, levels, audiences and durations as long as noncredit continuing education is the objective of the learning opportunity.

Thus we begin to observe that Continuing Engineering Studies, the subject of this conference, is but a narrow slice of the totality of continuing education. Clearly, the latter might be conducted to serve any conceivable audience and subject at the appropriate level and through the format and source of sponsorship that is best attuned to meet the identified need.

The common denominator among all continuing education, despite the multiple variables set forth above, is some measure of the knowledge transfer that is set out to be accomplished. This purpose of knowledge transfer is most often achieved in the traditional and familiar diploma- and degree-oriented programs through the recitation mode of instruction. Thus, ten such normal classroom hours of noncredit continuing education constitute one continuing education unit or one CEU.

This definition is not to deny the use of other formats, such as independent study, the educational technologies, etc. Indeed, such usages are on the ascendancy in continuing education by virtue of the very nature of the need in this comparatively unfettered field of education. This flexibility of continuing education makes it possible to serve individuals in their own time and circumstance and in the areas of their most immediate, and often unusual needs.

All that the proponents of the CEU ask is that the person or persons in responsible charge of the course design make the conversion between what is set out to be achieved in terms of the knowledge transfer through novel means and the corresponding amount of time it would take to accomplish the same or similar purposes in the classroom recitation mode of instruction. The argument may never subside, but this author fails to see why the transposition between formats should be difficult or the cause of concern among fellow educators and critical onlookers of the CEU.

It would be easy, and perhaps appropriate, for this assembly to endorse some other module of continuing education. In fact, a great many other such modules, each with differing conditions and terminology, have been tried by particular organizations, for specialized audiences, for short periods of time and with limited geographical range of understanding and use. The purpose behind the CEU is to define a module that serves all sponsors and fields of specialization, to be uniform on a national basis and to endure beyond the unstinting efforts of a particularly dedicated individual or group whose very mortality, heretofore, has spelled the early demise of the very causes that they have espoused so diligently.

It is safe to assume that the profession of engineering neither wishes nor expects "to exist as an island unto itself." Therefore, the need to broaden oneself into other fields of learning, to change fields altogether, to acquire new and specialized skills, as in the examples of the humanities, management or applied sciences, suggest that the module of continuing education that is applicable to engineering should also be compatible with a host of paralleling fields of study. This is what the CEU purports to do.

Why the Move to CEU?

Continuing education in this country has been the fastest growing sector of all education since the close of WW II. This fact of rapid and largely unstructured growth has been engendered in substantial part by the explosion of knowledge. But one also must be aware of the factor of the need today for so-called "relevant education." The traditional channels of learning have been trying to cope with this problem in a period of rapid change. This has been particularly true in their attempting to deal with the attitudes and values of the "now generation" of learners. That need will be even more pronounced when today's students become tomorrow's adult learners.

Increasingly, the education for specific careers and job functions will have to be obtained after graduation. This would appear to be a need of today's youth preparatory to the assumption of major responsibilities in the rapidly changing fields of opportunity to which they will soon aspire.

The rapid rate of obsolescence of existing technologies has been a further factor in creating a demand for continuing education directed toward the rehabilitation and retraining of the existing worker force. This later phenomenon now affects both white-collar and blue-collar workers in increasing number and with increasing rapidity.

When Is the CEU a Fact?

The CEU has been suggested merely as the common denominator among all ongoing noncredit continuing education. In other words, the introduction of the CEU simply makes it possible to determine the equivalent of "the GNP" when applied exclusively to the totality of continuing education activity currently operative within this country.

There has been no intent on the part of the task force effort in this regard to redefine "continuing education," although it is clear that a better definition of the term and its many formats is desirable under the uniform accounting that the CEU permits. In fact, the so-called "Standard Nine" of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools referred to above would purport to apply the CEU to all "special activities" among its 600 member institutions. This definition surely encompasses a wider spectrum

of activities than the broadly conceived definition of continuing education that the task force holds in common with most of you.

However, the distinction is made between "participation" and "application" in the philosophy and intent of the task force. Clearly, an individual may participate in an institutional activity, but find no credible application or use for the experience he has obtained anywhere within the occupational and economic milieu in which he operates.

This thought gives rise to the oft-repeated statement, "The usefulness of the CEU is in the eyes of the beholder." That is an important concept. The very recognition of this should serve to allay most concerns about abuse of the CEU. User group acceptance of the CEU most often will be before the fact and will derive as a direct consequence of the user group first seeking out a source of sponsorship and then sitting in counsel with that sponsor while the course offering is being designed. The acceptance of CEU after the fact will then depend upon the same factors that characterize the acceptance of formal education. Here such factors as source of sponsorship, key personnel involved, the time frame in which taken, the substantive aspects of courses taken, clearly identifiable goals that have been met over a sequence of related programs, evidence of individual evaluation, etc., will become increasingly important in the acceptance and use of CEU.

I hold this next view somewhat alone. However, I cannot see how my conception of the fact can be other than the final position to which the task force, this Division of ASEE (as a representative national professional organization) and the multitudinous number of sponsors of continuing education will subscribe. That is, CEU come about almost automatically, as it were, as the direct consequence of the continuing education learning experience having been conducted. CEU seems inevitable to me once there is an identifiable sponsor who performs the requisite functions of administration, instruction, applying some measure of individual participation and entering a record on an accessible, transferable and essentially permanent basis.

Where May the CEU Be Applied?

There are many among us who are primarily concerned with the continuing education of engineering types. Others of you represent the technologically oriented sector of business that employs relatively large numbers of graduate engineers. However, the perspective of the task force, by virtue of both its initial charge and its broad base of membership, has been considerably more wide-ranging in its outlook than, say, the concerns of the engineering profession acting in its own behalf.

Thus, it evolved rather early in the task force deliberations that the potential array of sponsors or producers of meaningful continuing education opportunities in the service of all society might well include the traditional institutions of higher education so well represented here. But then, in rapid succession, one must recognize other sponsors such as the burgeoning technical and community colleges that now undergird the system of higher education, then the proprietary schools of a typically specialized nature, the rapidly growing number of well-established educational consultants as represented by both individuals and groups, specialized segments of the publishing industry, the educational activities of many technical, professional and trade associations, educational opportunities sponsored by local civic and community groups, in-plant programs, media programs, etc.

Thus, two great uncertainties arise, insofar as delimiting the sources of CEU as concerned. These are: a) The potential sources of sponsorship capable of performing significant continuing education opportunities are multifarious and are continuously evolving, even as one attempts to document who they are at any given moment. b) No one individual or designated body can possibly make the determination that certain offerings fit specific needs for which they have been designed despite there often being close coordination between the sponsor of record and the identified user.

This leads me to the clear conviction -- a conviction, I must say, that gets lost from time to time within the task force -- that the marketplace decides, in the final analysis, whether or not the continuing education offering serves a societal need. For whatever purpose intended, that criterion suggests to me that continuing education activity merits the sponsor award and the user recognition of the CEU associated with it.

Indeed, the process delineated above surely works more effectively on a course-by-course basis where continuing education is concerned than it does within the typical academically oriented program. In diploma and degree programs, it seems to me, that the emphasis is most often placed upon the reputation of the institutions and the recognition by a peer group that a particular curriculum meets some regional or national norms that are both dated and established in the interests of the oversight group. Thus, formal education would appear to be locked largely within its own preconceived molds that are both honored and protected despite the world of rapid change that surrounds them. It does not seem probable, or even desirable, that the same judgmental factors that serve to define diploma- and degree-oriented education can be applied uniformly to all of the potential producers of continuing education or to the virtually unlimited number and variety of the offerings that they may extend, each in response to a perceived need.

How, Then, Is the CEU to Be Used?

The CEU serves several clear and distinct purposes. These range from: a) serving the immediate needs and aspirations of the individual, b) to the competency and qualifying concerns of his employer or membership group, c) to the public service orientation of the sponsor of record, d) to the accounting of such activities on the part of the organizational hierarchy to which the sponsor belongs, and d) to the local, state, regional and national purposes of statistical aggregation. These purposes should not be blurred as one.

Among the various interests in and uses of the CEU, the individual is interested in such matters as the acquisition of new knowledge. More specifically, his interests may vary between self-fulfillment and self-development, whether the latter objective is to qualify for advancement in employment or to attain membership, licensure, recertification, etc.

The next higher level of user-group aggregation, that is, the employer, the prospective employer, the membership organization, the licensure body, etc., has a similar, but a more coldly calculating, interest in the CEU. The user group unto whom the individual may be beholden may view the CEU in terms of how its acquisition better qualifies the individual or serves to complete an educational pattern, goal or applied curriculum, if you will, in the apparent fulfillment of an educational requirement. This presumably legitimate concern of the user group of record about the individual and his measure of improvement in skills or qualifications through the mechanisms of CEU is most often pursuant to the former taking an action or in making an administrative judgment where the subject individual is concerned. This is a rather heady subject that is largely the concern of the oversight body and not us.

At the same time, this is not to say that other individual attributes and qualifications are not also weighed in balance at the time that decisions are made upon the careers of individuals. Hopefully, many other factors are considered so that recognition of whatever kind the person receives is based upon something more than his personal track record in continuing education. Thus, it is recommended that formal educational background, pertinent work experiences, immediately past performance record, singular achievements, evaluation by testing, peer judgments, personal recommendations, evidences of leadership qualifications, etc., in addition of the recent accumulation of CEU, all may be concomitant parts of the user-group decision insofar as the forthcoming reward or recognition of the individual is concerned.

The sponsoring organization should not manifest a proprietary concern about the end uses of its CEU once the course offering has been completed and a record entered of the CEU earned by various individuals. From time to time, individuals and groups as users of CEU may well tend to aggregate them in ways that astonish, if not appall, various sponsors of component parts of the overall individual record. If the sponsor concerns himself with identifying needs, constructing programs to meet them, carrying out the educational mission to the best of his ability and then giving his clientele the legacy of a viable, relatively permanent and transferable CEU, he has fulfilled his principal purpose.

To these ends, the role of the typical institution of higher education, as a sponsor of continuing education, does not change by all that much under the system envisaged with the advent of CEU. He continues to do what he has done before, and then this much more: a) He consciously computes the CEU associated with each continuing education experience he now offers. Remember, CEU exists for that offering whether or not the sponsor actually takes the time to compute it or recognize it. b) He enters a record that serves essentially to authenticate what others seek to utilize. The sponsor's act is nothing more than the observation that the educational objective has been fulfilled upon the part of particular individuals who engaged in the exercise.

As in the laboratory, the measurement of CEU should be done without materially changing the observed process. In an idealized universe of continuing education, the introduction of CEU should not manifestly alter the circumstances surrounding that which is taking place. Thus, the future becomes an immediate extension of the past with the exception that CEU becomes a new and universal measure of continuing education enterprise and experience as we no go forward.

Concerned sponsors will find it in their own interest to work with user groups in establishing meaningful achievement programs as measured in terms of CEU. This is both necessary and desirable if the recognition programs that follows on the part of many user groups are not to become empty facades and the laughingstock of those who trade in them. To be sure, the reflection is upon the user more so than the sponsor, but the overall impression is bad unless the CEU is well used.

The image created in the use of CEU takes place after the fact of its award by the sponsor of record. In other words, the sponsor's event is automatic whereas the end use of the CEU is an option of the user group involved. It is in the sponsor interest to counsel with the potential user group to the extent that his CEU will be used. The purpose above is to assure that a useful commodity, such as CEU, does not become misapplied by claiming more for it than it rightfully can expect to mean.

By the same token, I do not think that the sponsoring organizations, as in the example of the major institutions of higher education, can lend their imprimatur to large numbers of achievement programs except in the rare instances that they are sponsor of record for substantially all of the CEU that constitute the individual record of accumulation. Even as they do that, those same institutional sponsors, whether knowingly or unknowingly, may be simultaneously contributing toward hundreds of other recognition programs over which they exercise no immediate control and have little contact with the results thereof.

In the final analysis, the typical sponsor is no more than a partial contributor to the many recognition programs that follow upon the widespread adoption and use of CEU. Thus the concern of the sponsor, as often stated here, should be with the organization and conduct of programs of continuing education -- and very little more. These learning opportunities should be conceived and carried out to the best of his ability and in the service of consumer needs. Beyond that, the sponsor has but an advisory influence over the uses made of CEU. In short, he is the same sponsor as of old. He simply has learned the better to merchandise his continuing education product.

The user, on the other hand, receives his continuing education from a variety of sources of sponsorship. He also seeks his place within the hierarchical structure of society on the merits of what he has achieved. His record of accomplishment is attested only in part by his accumulation of CEU. In the words of Aristotle to his student, Alexander, the Great, "There is no royal road to learning." Moreover, the stature of any particular group or its constituent members can be no higher than the standards they set and maintain for themselves.

So much, then, for the external concerns about the CEU the sponsor has purveyed. Internally, there are many by-product benefits to be realized by sponsors who have large-scale operations that arise out of accounting for all continuing education activity in CEU. Such factors as use of faculty and facilities, FTE calculations, cost-effectiveness studies, etc., become immediately available to sponsors and the larger systems to which they most often belong. These second-order benefits seem more important, as a legitimate use of the CEU by the sponsor, than any real or imagined concern he may have about the comparative tugging and hauling that takes place in the application of CEU among the 35,000 job skills and professional callings in this country. The increments of recognition that various user groups achieve, as based upon the widespread and diversified accumulation of CEU, surely is of more importance to the group itself than to the multiple points of origin for such CEU. It becomes necessary for each user group to establish, to maintain and then reap the benefits from CEU in combination with the many other factors that determine longevity and success in the job market for the particular user group showing a concern about its own avenues of development.

Conclusion

The distinctions I have made between the respective interests and concerns of sponsors and users are neither crass nor cold-hearted. However, the distinctions I have made are essential to the operation of the large, diversified and evolving system of continuing education that is extant in this country. That system includes both the sources or the capabilities for continuing education and the aspirants therefor whether viewed as individuals or as the interest groups that are most often identified in the determination of educational needs.

The user is an important concept in this view of continuing education. Whether an individual or an affinity group, the user can, in fact, very nearly take care of his own continuing education through the many sources and avenues of learning that lie open before him. After all, we are not that far removed from the memory and the example of a self-educated man in the person of Abraham Lincoln.

Therefore, the great heterogeneous family of potential sponsors of continuing education would do well to recognize that the user, again, alone or in groups, really determines where his program of continuing education takes him. Educational institutions do not deal with captive audiences where continuing education is concerned. In being responsive to this broad area of need, neither they nor their association counterparts define the curriculum in its entirety as is their custom for higher education per se.

How much simpler, then, for the institution of higher education, as a sponsor of CEU, to absolve itself of the responsibility of supervising or otherwise assuring the overall excellence of all aspects of a continuing education program that is obtained through a number of participating institutions of varying repute, through a host of proprietary and society or association sources, through various consultantships and in-plant programs of a highly applied nature, etc. The sources, substantive aspects and uses of continuing education are simply too varied for the individual sponsor to exercise a degree of control over the total that is any way commensurate with his concern, in reality, about attesting to the quality and execution of the whole. This grave matter is simply beyond his interest and capabilities.

In the recording and authenticating of CEU on behalf of individuals, the sponsor is not entering into a substitute for the degree programs in which so many of them are preeminent. The individual sponsor simply should be concerned with the merits of the modular product, or CEU, he has contributed to the overall continuing education program of the individuals and user groups served. The larger designs, to which such modules are applied, should not be of great moment to the sponsor or come under his control except in an advisory capacity as a member of a diversified planning group.

The reasons for this separation of responsibility and concerns should be clear. The typical sponsor, for example, should not be concerned with the hiring or promotional policies of particular employers, with the entry qualifications or award requirements of membership organizations, with the statutory provisions for licensure and recertification, etc.

This understanding, then, should make it possible to close by saying that the future of the CEU depends upon the uses that are made of it. This becomes essentially the whole question once the sponsors of the continuing education agree to take the simple step of defining, packaging, conducting and recording their own work product in the CEU mode.

In the parlance of the current administration, the entire matter of use of the CEU is but Phase II of an operation that follows when Phase I, or the universal adoption of the CEU by sponsors of all major importance, becomes a reality. I believe that Phase I is now close upon us and, indeed, that the future of the CEU will be assured through the advent of Phase II or the salutary and purposeful application of CEU by user groups for their recognition goals.

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